

Viewing and Description in *Hysmine and Hysminias* *The Fresco of the Virtues*

PAROMA CHATTERJEE

To Robert S. Nelson and Jaś Elsner

The abundance of visual imagery in the twelfth-century Byzantine novel is a well-known, if still little explored, phenomenon. Scholars have rightly emphasized the new and unique themes dominating the genre: extensive immersion in the world of classical antiquity and its mores; the importance given to Eros and erotic desires; and last, but not least, frequently intriguing reversals of art and nature.¹ But the specific

mechanics of visuality deployed when the protagonists confront a series of images, whether in dreams or in the fictional “reality” of the novels, have not been studied to their fullest extent.² The fact that almost every instance of looking at images differs from the others in significant ways, not just within one novel, but from similar instances in other novels as well, indicates the range of models of visual interpretation that the Byzantine intelligentsia envisioned and, possibly, practiced.

This essay performs a close reading of one instance of viewing among the many that punctuate Eustathios Makrembolites’ novel from the twelfth century, *Hysmine and Hysminias*.³ It is an episode that has not been given due importance in the literature so far: Hysminias, the narrator and protagonist, has, for the first time, come across four maidens painted on a garden wall.⁴ The incident takes place in a land foreign to Hysminias; the novel begins with the selection of

1 For literature on the Byzantine novel that discusses some of these themes, see R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (London, 1996); F. Conca, *Il romanzo bizantino del XII secolo: Teodoro Prodromo—Niceta Eugeniano—Eustazio Macrembolita—Constantino Manasse* (Turin, 1994); P. A. Agapitos and O. L. Smith, *The Study of Medieval Greek Romance: A Re-assessment of Recent Work* (Copenhagen, 1992); P. A. Agapitos and D. R. Reinsch, eds., *Der Roman im Byzanz der Komnenenzeit: Ein internationales Symposium; Referate des Internationalen Symposiums an der Freien Universität Berlin, 3–6 April 1998* (Wiesbaden, 2000); C. Cupane, “Byzantinisches Erotikon: Ansichten und Einsichten,” *JÖB* 37 (1987): 213–33; E. Jeffreys, “The Novels of Mid-Twelfth Century Constantinople: The Literary and Social Context,” in *Aetos: Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango*, ed. I. Ševčenko and I. Hutter (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998), 191–99; I. Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos, Rhetorical Pleasure: Narrative Technique and Mimesis in Eumathios Makrembolites’ Hysmine and Hysminias* (Uppsala, 2001); P. Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Medieval Greek Novel* (Cambridge, MA, 2005). For a recent translation with introduction and notes on Byzantine novels, see E. Jeffreys, *Four Byzantine Novels: Theodore Prodromos, Rhodanthe and Dosikles; Eumathios Makrembolites, Hysmine and Hysminias; Constantine Manasses, Aristandros and Kallithea; Niketas Eugenianos, Drosilla and Charikles* (Liverpool, 2012).

2 See P. Agapitos, “Dreams and the Spatial Aesthetics of Narrative Presentation in Livistros and Rhodamne,” *DOP* 53 (1999): 111–47; idem, “Poets and Painters: Theodoros Prodromos’ Dedicatory Verses of his Novel to an Anonymous Caesar,” *JÖB* 50 (2000): 173–85; S. MacAlister, *Dreams and Suicides: The Greek Novel from Antiquity to the Byzantine Empire* (London, 1996).

3 For discussion of Makrembolites, see H. Hunger, “Die Makremboliten auf byzantinischen Bleisiegeln und in sonstigen Belegen,” *SBS* 5 (1998): 1–28; Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos*, 11–13.

4 *Ismine e Isminia* (subsequently referred to as *H&H*), 2.2.1–2.6.7, ed. and trans. Conca, *Romanzo bizantino*.

Hysminias as the herald of the city of Eurykomis, who then sets out for the city of Aulikomis.⁵ Lavishly welcomed at Aulikomis, Hysminias—accompanied by his friend and cousin Kratisthenes—is given the gracious hospitality of Sosthenes. As the guests are wined and dined in Sosthenes' garden, his daughter, Hysmine, flirts outrageously with Hysminias, causing the virgin youth no little embarrassment. These incidents set the stage for the episode that follows, in which Hysminias and Kratisthenes wander into their host's garden and marvel at the images of the maidens that they see on its walls. The ensuing narrative recounts Hysminias's conversion to an ardent lover who, after various vicissitudes and adventures, manages to unite with his love, Hysmine.

Ingela Nilsson's study has uncovered the narrative strategies undergirding the entire structure of *Hysmine and Hysminias*, and the ways in which it sustains a creative intertextual dialogue with its ancient model, *Leucippe and Kleitophon* by Achilles Tatius.⁶ Paul Magdalino, in an in-depth examination of one of the key scenes of visual interpretation in the novel, has revealed how the figure of Eros encompassed sociopolitical overtones of the Byzantine *basileus*, specifically as imaged by the flamboyant Manuel I Komnenos.⁷ Indeed, that episode follows immediately upon the one under consideration here; first Hysminias sees the images of the four maidens, and immediately afterward he encounters the image of Eros explored by Magdalino. Antony Littlewood and Charles Barber, in turn, have pointed to the connections between the erotic incidents of the plot and the garden landscapes in which they invariably occur.⁸

Building on these studies, this essay argues that the first encounter between Hysminias and the

images (the painted maidens on the wall) illuminates at least three important aspects of Byzantine visuality. First, it is one of the rare occasions in Byzantine literature in which a viewer—Hysminias—articulates his response to a suite of images *during* the process of viewing. Furthermore, Hysminias is not alone, but is accompanied by Kratisthenes, who in turn articulates his reactions to Hysminias's responses (if very briefly), thus delineating a multilayered network of exchanges between the images and the two viewers, each of whom responds somewhat differently to what he sees in front of him. Considered in this light, the episode is a treasure trove for scholars seeking insights into the nuances of Byzantine modes of viewing and the different meanings that different spectators can derive from the same image, even within a single duration of viewing.

Second, the episode elaborates on the distinction between two kinds of rhetorical effects: the extended description and the inscription, or epigram. Both are in play in Hysminias's appreciation of the images: he launches into lengthy ekphraseis of the maidens as he views them, only after which does he realize that each figure is accompanied by iambic verses that reveal its particular identity and explain its attributes. (This is a decidedly different move from that which Hysminias performs in his second encounter, which is with the image of Eros; on that occasion, Hysminias offers a fairly detailed, but relatively perfunctory, description of the image *along with* the epigram explicating it.)⁹ Consequently, the reader of the novel is urged to evaluate the affective and hermeneutical differences between these genres of description, and how words and their rhetorical arrangements can conjure vivid images and furnish knowledge—or not. Hysminias's identity as a herald, entrusted with the task of transmitting messages and thus implicitly blessed with eloquence, factors into the varying levels of speech built into this episode. A contest is staged between the effects of Hysminias's long, captivating descriptions and the power of the epigrams accompanying the images, whose content, interestingly, is never fully spelled out. This suppression of the epigrams alerts the reader to a potential textual imbalance in the episode and to a heightened concentration on Hysminias's personal viewpoint and the knowledge it encompasses. In the process, the reader

5 *H&H* 1–2.6.7.

6 Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, ed. J. P. Garnaud, trans. T. Whitmarsh (Oxford, 2003); see Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos*. For a discussion of the ancient novel and its author, see E. Vilborg, ed., *Achilles Tatius: Leucippe and Kleitophon*, 2 vols. (Stockholm, 1955–62) and J. N. O'Sullivan, *A Lexicon to Achilles Tatius* (London and New York, 1980). For a brilliant recent discussion of Achilles Tatius's novel, see H. Morales, *Vision and Narrative in Achilles Tatius' Leucippe and Clitophon* (Cambridge, 2004).

7 P. Magdalino, "Eros the King and King of Amours: Some Observations on *Hysmine and Hysminias*," *DOP* 46 (1992): 197–204.

8 A. R. Littlewood, "Romantic Paradises: The Role of the Garden in the Byzantine Romance," *BMGS* 5 (1979): 95–114; C. Barber, "Reading the Garden in Byzantium: Nature and Sexuality," *BMGS* 16 (1992): 1–19.

9 *H&H* 2.10.5. The epigram is as follows: "Ἐρως τὸ μεῖράκιον δπλα, πῦρ φέρον, τόξον, πτερόν, γύμνωσιν, ἰχθύων βέλος.

gains insight into the mimetic confusions that arise when images are transcribed in words, as well as the kinds of knowledge that ekphraseis and epigrams each have the ability to encapsulate and transmit.

Third, the presentation of Hysminias throughout the episode as a viewer peculiarly sensitive to color is significant. Each of his ekphrastic effusions on the maidens pivots on the brilliance or combination of their colors; in the process, a veritable tapestry is wrought for the reader, in which contrasting shades fuse or separate, according to the rhythms of Hysminias's prose. Liz James's study of color in Byzantium is an obvious point of departure for an examination of this phenomenon.¹⁰ I contend that in the context of *Hysmine and Hysminias*, color assumes a moral connotation, functioning as an index of the accuracy of verbal description. Even as it enlivens the readers' apprehension of the images viewed by Hysminias, color also inflects the degree to which the hero's vision corresponds to the truth of what he sees, as well as the degree to which he is beguiled (or misled).

The motif of a protagonist encountering an image and responding to it is frequently employed in ancient and late antique literature, for example, in the *Tabula Ceбетis*,¹¹ Prudentius's *Peristephanon*,¹² and Achilles Tatius's *Leukippe and Kleitophon*;¹³ indeed, as already noted, *Hysmine and Hysminias* has been regarded as an imitation of the last work. But there are important differences between the kinds of viewing that take place in the ancient works and in *Hysmine and Hysminias*. The narrator/protagonists of the *Tabula Ceбетis* and the *Peristephanon* also find themselves face to face

with images: a wall with allegorical figures representing the dangers and temptations besetting human life in a sanctuary at Kronos, in the first case (*Tabula Ceбетis*, 1–2), and a painting that appears in front of a local martyr's tomb at Imola, depicting images of his horrific martyrdom, in the second (*Peristephanon*, 9.3–16).¹⁴ The beholders attempt to describe the images they see, but in both cases their descriptions are accompanied by explications furnished by another character (an old man in the *Tabula Ceбетis*, the tomb's caretaker in the *Peristephanon*), who has intimate knowledge of the images and knows some of the details behind their manufacture. Thus, ekphrasis, or the description of the images, goes almost hand in hand with exegesis, or explication.¹⁵ In our Byzantine novel, it is, again, the *second* episode of viewing that replicates the strategies of the ancient novels. When Hysminias sees the image of Eros and his entourage, it is (surprisingly) Kratisthenes who goes on to explain the various components of the image to him.¹⁶ But in the first episode under consideration here, neither Hysminias nor Kratisthenes gives any indications of understanding what they see, nor are they given helpful pointers along the way by a native informant. Their unfamiliarity with the images inflects the process of viewing in significant ways, which shall be explored in the body of this essay.

The most important difference between *Leukippe and Kleitophon* and *Hysmine and Hysminias* is that the work of art that opens the ancient novel is identified as the Rape of Europa by its viewer/protagonist. Although there is some argument over whether the maiden depicted is Europa or Selene, the identities of the characters in the painting are confidently posited by the viewers.¹⁷ Such clarity is completely at odds with the stance of our viewer, Hysminias, who does not attain certainty about what he sees until the very end of the episode, when he reads the epigrams accompanying the images; indeed, Hysminias does not even attempt to decipher the identities of the maidens, so immersed

10 L. James, *Light and Color in Byzantine Art* (Oxford, 1996).

11 Cebes of Thebes, *Tabula*, introduction and notes by C. S. Jerram (Oxford, 1878). See also J. Fitzgerald and L. M. White, *The Tabula of Cebes* (Chico, 1983); and M. B. Trapp, "On the Tablet of Cebes," in *Aristotle and After*, ed. R. Sorabji (London, 1997), 159–78.

12 Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 126, ed. M. Cunningham (Turnhout, 2010), CL 1443, versus 1–5, carmen 9. For a discussion of Prudentius and his work, see I. Lana, *Due capitoli Prudenziiani: La biografia, la cronologia delle opere, la poetica*, Verba seniorum, Collana di testi e studi patristici (Rome, 1962); M. J. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon by Prudentius* (Ann Arbor, 1993); and, more recently, E. Prolingheuer, *Zur literarischen Technik bei Prudentius' Peristephanon: Gebrauchen und Ersetzen* (Hamburg, 2008) and M. Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity: Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul* (Baltimore, 2008).

13 On *Leukippe and Kleitophon*, see n. 6.

14 For a discussion of the kinds of ekphraseis in the *Tabula Ceбетis* and the *Peristephanon*, see C. Kässer, "The Body Is Not Painted On: Ekphrasis and Exegesis in Prudentius Peristephanon 9," *Ramus* 31, nos. 1–2 (2002): 158–75.

15 Ibid.

16 *H&H* 2.11.1–2.11.3

17 This is discussed in some detail in Morales, *Vision and Narrative* (n. 6 above), 37–48.

is he in delighting over their visualization. Yet another difference between the episode of viewing in *Leukippe and Kleitophon* and *Hysmine and Hysminias* is that in the former, the descriptions of the paintings prompt, or foreshadow, the events and narratives that follow.¹⁸ In *Hysmine and Hysminias*, in contrast, the images on the garden wall serve as a prelude to the ensuing narrative, to be sure, but it is not until Hysminias's *second* encounter with a suite of images—that of Eros and his entourage—that the course of the narrative becomes clear, with the stubbornly chaste Hysminias realizing, then experiencing, the force of erotic desire.

The image of the four maidens therefore remains an enigma in the scholarly literature by differing in important ways from its ancient counterparts. It requires investigation not only because these differences illuminate aspects of a specifically Byzantine mode of viewing, but also because the episode as a whole has not received the attention it deserves. Nilsson has examined both the ways in which the maidens proclaim the virtues required of the novels' protagonists and the oppositions invoked in their depiction, particularly in the opposing qualities associated with the rose and the laurel, which recur as motifs in the novel.¹⁹ This essay expands on Nilsson's insights by probing the processes and implications behind Hysminias's and Kratisthenes' views of the maidens.

Two points concerning Byzantine viewership must be discussed before we proceed. The first pertains to ekphrasis (of which Hysminias offers a stirring performance when he sees the maidens on the wall). The scholarship on ekphrasis is as vast as it is erudite.²⁰ Ruth Webb's definitive study demonstrates that according to ancient rhetorical handbooks, such as the *Progymnasmata* and their commentators, ekphrasis

was regarded as the description of an event, a place, a period, an image, or a person, which brought the subject (the event, the image, the person, and so forth) vividly before the eyes of the listener.²¹ This required the skillful deployment of language; consequently, ekphrasis was always an act of translation from the visual to the verbal (with all its attendant slippages, as I shall discuss below). According to Aphthonios's definition in his *Rhetorical Exercises*, widely used in Byzantium, "Ἐκφρασίς ἐστι λόγος περιγηματικὸς ὑπ' ὅψιν ἄγων ἐναργῶς ["vividly"] τὸ δηλούμενον."²² The goal of a successful ekphrasis was to engage the listener not just as a viewer, but also as a participant in the narrative. A key component of ekphrasis, therefore, was *enargeia*, or vividness, felicitously defined by Stratis Papaioannou as "the activation of imagination through descriptive discourse."²³

In the ekphrasis in *Hysmine and Hysminias*, it is remarkable that *enargeia* reflects varied, even potentially discordant, values. If *enargeia* in the ancient world prompted the visualization of a scene by triggering images in the audience's mind, indeed, before its very eyes,²⁴ it did not denote a similar, or even uniform, concept in Byzantium, as Papaioannou argues.²⁵ An examination of Byzantine texts between the ninth and twelfth centuries discloses that *enargeia*, when discussed at all, signified "not representation, style, or rhetorical form—as the technical meaning . . . might require—but, instead, truth."²⁶ *Enargeia* in this capacity is sometimes contrasted with fiction (*mythos*).

18 See Morales' discussion of this in *ibid.*, 96–100.

19 Nilsson, *Erotic Pathos* (n. 2 above), 114–17.

20 For a discussion of Byzantine ekphrasis, see R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Burlington, VT, 2009). Other examples include L. James and R. Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium," *Art History* 14 (1991): 1–17; R. S. Nelson, "To Say and To See: Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. *idem* (Cambridge, 2000), 143–68; and R. Webb, "Accomplishing the Picture: Ekphrasis, Mimesis, and Martyrdom in Asterios of Amaseia," in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. L. James (Cambridge, 2007), 13–32.

21 The *Progymnasmata*, or the ancient rhetorical handbooks, define ekphrasis as a speech that "brings the subject matter vividly to the eyes." The earliest, first-century version of the *Progymnasmata* is generally attributed to Ailius Theon. A third-century version is wrongly attributed by ancient writers to Hermogenes of Tarsos; a fourth-century version to Aphthonios; and a fifth-century version to a certain Nikolaos. For a discussion of these texts and the importance of rhetorical training in the ancient world, see Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*, 14–17.

22 "Ekphrasis is a descriptive speech bringing the subject vividly before one's eyes." For the translation and a discussion of *enargeia*, see S. Papaioannou, "Byzantine Enargeia and Theories of Representation," *Byzantinoslavica* 3 (2011): 48. The passage is from Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata*, ed. H. Rabe, *Rhetores Graeci* 10 (Leipzig, 1926), 36.22–23.

23 Papaioannou, "Byzantine Enargeia," 48.

24 Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*, 105.

25 Papaioannou, "Byzantine Enargeia," 48–60.

26 *Ibid.*, 50.

The contrast is apposite to this study, as the ekphrasis is performed by a fictional character in the plot of a novel (on which more below).

But, as Papaioannou indicates, *enargeia* did not entirely lose its ancient technical definition in Byzantium. It is endowed with connotations of suggestive, allusive speech in a fragmentary work of John Sikeliotēs in the eleventh century, thus complicating its alliance with self-evident, unembellished truth. Sikeliotēs claims that “whenever we indicate, through some sign or word, something which cannot be spoken, this I call *enargeia*” (ὅταν γὰρ τι τῶν μὴ δυνατῶν λεχθῆναι διὰ τινος σημείου ἢ λέξεως ἐμφαίνωμεν, ἐνάργειαν τοῦτό φημι).²⁷ Eustathios of Thessalonike reinforces this dimension by claiming that *enargeia* is achieved through the use of similes, metaphors, and comparisons (ἢ παραβολή),²⁸ thereby implying that “vividness” can be accomplished only through the creation of a series of analogous, but not strictly congruent, images. As we shall see, these wayward—even conflicting—definitions of *enargeia* are juxtaposed during Hysminias’s encounter with the painted maidens, first in the (sometimes misleading) metaphors of his ekphrasis, then in the epigrams accompanying the images, which purport to reveal their true identities.

In keeping with Sikeliotēs’ and Eustathios’s definitions of *enargeia*, not all ekphraseis guaranteed a straightforward, or entirely congruent, comprehension of the subjects they claimed to describe. Robert S. Nelson has pointed out how Patriarch Photios, in his homily on the apse mosaic in Hagia Sophia, describes the physical features and stance of the Theotokos in a series of paradoxes.²⁹ This variety of ambiguity is evident in Hysminias’s ekphrasis as well, but with a difference. While the patriarch was confident that the image he referred to was that of the Theotokos, regardless of whether she was seated or not,

Hysminias is entirely ignorant of the identities and import of the images he looks upon. His appreciation of their visual representation does not elucidate their meaning. It is through the epigrams identifying the images, rather than Hysminias’s copious eloquence, that their meanings are unveiled. The episode thus exposes the limits of the viewer’s potential to see and understand images simultaneously.

If Hysminias himself meanders in his ekphrasis, his own status as a fictional viewer of a fictional representation adds yet another level of mediation to the reader’s “view” and understanding of the painted maidens. It is, in fact, the author, Eustathios Makrembolites, who is the main focalizer in the novel; he leads Hysminias into hyperbolic descriptions punctuated, at times, with “mistakes.” The reader can choose to immerse himself in Hysminias’s ekphrasis or to recall that it is Makrembolites’ manipulation of his protagonist that he is viewing and reading about.³⁰ Ironically, this manipulation is made evident by the introduction of yet another fictional character, Hysminias’s friend Kratisthenes, whose responses alert the reader to Hysminias’s deviations in his descriptions from a strict correspondence to their pictorial counterparts. Kratisthenes’ reactions—in one instance, outright laughter—hint at another, potentially divergent, interpretation of the images under view.³¹ A comparable maneuver in *Leukippe and Kleitophon* occurs at precisely the moment when it is unclear whether the painting of the ostensible Rape of Europa does indeed depict Europa, or some other maiden. This episode has been brilliantly read by Helen Morales as a deliberate demonstration of the bivalent nature of the painting and, by extension, of the entire narrative itself.³² The insight may apply to our heroes as well, who together reveal “the multiple narrative possibilities of the sign,”³³ in this case, the images on the garden wall.

The second important point regarding Byzantine visuality—and one that our episode forcefully dis-closes—is that an intellectual comprehension of the

27 Trans. S. Papaioannou. The extract is from *Commentary on the Forms of Hermogenes*, ed. C. Walz, *Rhetores graeci*, vol. 6 (Stuttgart, 1834), 336.24–26. See Papaioannou, “Byzantine Enargeia,” 53.

28 Papaioannou, “Byzantine Enargeia,” 55–56, where he cites a number of passages from the *Commentary on the Iliad* and the *Odysses* by Eustathios.

29 See *Homily 17* by Patriarch Photios in *Photiou Homiliai*, ed. B. Laourdas (Thessalonike, 1951), 168, and in *The Homilies of Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople: Translation and Commentary*, ed. C. Mango (Washington, DC, 1958), 286–96, and Nelson, “To Say” (n. 20 above).

30 Webb discusses this sort of dual consciousness with reference to actors and declaimers who performed ekphraseis of imaginary events and often purported to be characters other than themselves. See Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*, 175–78.

31 *H&H* 2.2.3. This will be discussed in more detail below.

32 Morales, *Vision and Narrative*, 37–48.

33 *Ibid.*, 48.

images is attained in a long, drawn-out process, consisting in multiple instances of viewing, which rapidly succeed each other. This is yet another difference from the ostensible mastery of their subjects that most ekphraseis (and their writers) demonstrate. Photios, Constantine Rhodios, and Manuel Philes, to name just a few practitioners, show a firm grasp of their material: an overarching and extended gaze at the subject in “one take,” as it were. Even when Photios claims that visitors such as himself were turned into trees upon entering the atrium of a church (supposedly the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos) or that he forgot to mention something about it that he should not have omitted, he never once pauses or stumbles in his description of that building.³⁴

Hysminias’s ekphrasis, in stark contrast, is construed as a series of reiterations that reinforce his lack of mastery over the images. This is never more evident than when we examine Manuel Philes’ description of a somewhat similar image of the Virtues in the Palace at Constantinople, which supposedly reflected the emperor’s character. Philes not only identifies the images accurately but also proceeds to inquire why only four of them were depicted and not the emperor in person.³⁵ Hysminias shows no such mental alacrity. Furthermore, each instance of his viewing results in a corresponding depletion of the space and value granted to ekphrasis. The very skill that he uses in order to clarify the images is gradually shorn off, as he approaches their meaning. The epigrams, in contrast, take Hysminias—and the reader—straight to the identities of the maidens, whereas the ekphrasis only confounds. Is the ekphrasis, then, a mere prelude intended to distract the reader and to show up Hysminias’s susceptibilities to women (both painted and real), and nothing more?

Some thoughts on allegorical interpretation are required to answer this question. While critics have long recognized the proleptic and symbolic powers of ekphraseis in ancient novels³⁶ (and this applies to the Byzantine novels as well), the ekphrasis in *Hysmine*

and *Hysminias* also functions as an allegorical reading (albeit, one performed unwittingly by Hysminias). But instead of a one-to-one correspondence between Hysminias’s description of the maidens and their identities, as most allegorical interpretations are believed to proceed, the reader is offered rich verbal surfaces of interconnected meanings, replete with visual puns and metaphors, before those identities are revealed. If “the plots of all allegorical narratives unfold as investigations into the literal truth inherent in individual words,”³⁷ then Hysminias’s ekphrasis qualifies as such an investigation. What is new is that it is not just the individual words, but the individual parts of the images of the maidens that are also offered up to the reader, so that he or she might contemplate the differences between the literal and metaphorical (or allegorical) meanings.

The episode thus offers a critique of the efficacy of rhetorical response to visual stimuli; an extended ekphrasis versus four (never clearly enunciated) epigrams. In so doing, it parses the images into their critical components for the viewer, or Hysminias, who displays a certain selectivity as he gazes upon them. The importance of those aspects that our hero *does* permit himself to see (and to talk about) and the ways in which they confound the dialogue between art and nature offer a glimpse into a mode of selective viewing, which has not usually been touched upon in Byzantine studies.

Last, but not least, a word about those tantalizing ladies. If an ekphrasis (whether of images or events or persons) functions as a metafiction, “causing the reader . . . [to] experience . . . the disjunction between the fictional world and reality,”³⁸ then Hysminias’s ekphrasis can be designated a metafiction of sorts; the painted women, the metafictional counterparts to the “real” (but also fictional) women in the novel. That being said, the fictional world invoked in *Hysmine* and *Hysminias* is not entirely bereft of elements of the real world. Indeed, as I shall show, some of Hysminias’s (or Makrembolites’ representation of Hysminias’s) observations on the maidens are directly inspired by central facets of Byzantine visual culture—in particular, his responsiveness to the brilliance of certain colors and his allusions to established metaphors and imagery. In this respect, Hysminias’s experience has much to offer the

34 See Photios, *Homily* 10.4, ed. B. Laourdas (Thessalonike, 1959), 101–2, and the translation in Mango, *Homilies of Photios*, 185–86.

35 See Manuel Philes, poem 237, in *Manuelis Philae Carmina ex codicibus escurialensibus, florentinis, parisinis et vaticanis*, 2 vols., ed. E. Miller (Paris, 1855–57), 124 and the translation in C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312–1453* (Toronto, 1986), 247.

36 The seminal study on this subject is by S. Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Princeton, 1989).

37 M. Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, NY, 1979), 33.

38 Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion*, 185.

cultural historian about the range of models of viewer-ship that were imagined to be possible in Byzantium.

Before embarking on an analysis of the episode, however, it will be fruitful to examine the resonance of gardens for the Byzantines; after all, it is in a garden that the episode takes place. While the association of gardens with amorous activity and, conversely, of the walled garden with virginity, has been explored,³⁹ one must ask whether gardens enforce a specific visual reaction in this episode. In short, is the viewing process in *Hysmine and Hysminias* significantly inflected by its location in such a landscape? Henry Maguire has shown that a distinct shift occurred in the attitude toward garden culture in the later years of the Byzantine Empire.⁴⁰ While the writers of the Roman period and late antiquity use the concept of the garden as an all-embracing, outward-looking feature, a launching pad for a view into the wider world, Byzantine writers turn their gaze inward, focusing on the garden as an enclosed space, isolated from the larger landscape in which it exists. After Iconoclasm, the natural elements were regarded as entities to be tamed, controlled, and made subservient to Christ. Gardens were perceived as the sites where such control could be efficaciously wrought. I suggest that this insight is of importance to the garden as a narrative site in *Hysmine and Hysminias* for at least two reasons.

First, the inward focus of the garden is brought to bear upon Hysminias's process of viewing, which narrows on a few localized particulars rather than expanding outward. Indeed, as I will show, Hysminias's gaze is so concentrated that he neglects to appreciate various important aspects of the objects he views. Second, the tension between the elements of nature and man-made marvels is evident, even in Hysminias's much circumscribed vision. Although the episode I discuss eschews descriptions of fountains, statues, and flora

and fauna that the other episodes include,⁴¹ the skill of the painter nonetheless manages to conjure up nature itself. This feature disrupts Hysminias's inward concentration on the garden wall and forces it to overflow its boundaries. Nature refuses to be left out of the process, even if she does not ostensibly constitute the object of the viewer's gaze.

Just what is it, then, that Hysminias sees? Wandering into the garden with his friend Kratisthenes, they come upon a wall colored with images. Four maidens are depicted. Hysminias describes each of them, lingering over specific parts of their bodies and dress, postures and expressions.

At the sight of the first maiden, Hysminias launches into an extended description of the crown on her head: it is studded all around with flashing stones (the word *τηλαυγείς* literally means "far-beaming") that shine forth fire and light and, curiously, seem also to be full of water.⁴² Seeing these, Hysminias claims that one might imagine that things that could never be mingled had come together: water and fire in the stones, both delightful, both graceful. Further embroidering the conceit, he says that "on the one hand, it was covered over with waves of blushes; on the other, it flashed" (*Τὸ μὲν κυματοῦται τῷ ἐρυθρήματι, τὸ δ' ἀπαστράπτει, 2.2.2*). Exactly which element blushed in a torrent of waves and which flashed is unclear, but the luminous, color-changing form of the stones is beyond doubt. Following one enigma with another, Hysminias claims that "thus did the artist scrupulously imitate the nature of the stones" (*οὕτως ὁ τεχνίτης ἀκριβῶς τὴν φύσιν τῶν λίθων ἀπεμιμήσατο*).

That Hysminias's gaze is immediately attracted by the flashing stones is explained by the Byzantine fascination with light. James has shown how the appreciation of color in the Byzantine world hinged upon light-reflecting qualities rather than hue.⁴³ Hysminias's subsequent description of the maiden's hair conjures up its golden luster, as well as the golden flash of the silver necklace around her throat. A hyacinth fastens her robe; *hyakinthos*, as James has shown, refers not just

39 For the garden's association with erotic activities, see Barber "Reading the Garden in Byzantium" (n. 8 above); for the garden as a metaphor for the Annunciation, see H. Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, 1981), 46; M.-L. Dolezal and M. Mavroudi, "Theodore Hyrtakenos' *Description of the Garden of St. Anna* and the Ekphrasis of Gardens," in *Byzantine Garden Culture*, ed. A. Littlewood, H. Maguire, and J. Wolschke-Bulmann (Washington, DC, 2002), 105–58.

40 H. Maguire, "Paradise Withdrawn," in Littlewood et al., *Byzantine Garden Culture*, 23–35.

41 For literature on fountains, see Dolezal and Mavroudi, "Theodore Hyrtakenos' *Description*," 121–32.

42 *H&H* 2.2.1: Λίθοι περὶ τὸν στέφανον μάλα τηλαυγείς, πῦρ ἀπαστράπτοντες καὶ φῶς ἀπαυγάζοντες, ὑδάτων μεστοί. Εἴποις ἰδὼν μεμίχθαι τὰ ἄμικτα, ὕδωρ καὶ πῦρ, ἐν λίθῳ καὶ ἄμφω χαρίεντα.

43 James, *Light and Color* (n. 10 above).

to the flower but also to a precious, gleaming stone.⁴⁴ Bissera V. Pentcheva's exploration of *poikilia* as "diversity" or "an arresting sight of varied and shifting sensual impressions" also comes into play in Hysminias's impressions of the crown, now rippling with blushes, now emitting fiery points of light.⁴⁵ Both James's and Pentcheva's exploration of the word "porphyry" is of importance here.⁴⁶ *Porphyreos* encompasses a range of connotations from the Homeric "dark-gleaming sea" to "russet" to "lustrous" and "glittering." These alternating effects are precisely what Hysminias perceives in the crown: a changing spectacle of water suffused with crimson hues and lustrous tongues of fire.

But while Hysminias draws on an array of metaphors linking water and fire, his description of the precious stones remains intriguing for the ways in which it confounds mimetic practice and appearance. Opening with a seemingly straightforward account of the crown, Hysminias then draws comparisons between the stones and the natural elements, such that the "fire" and the "water" take on a force of their own, overshadowing the stones. This maneuver on Hysminias's part is akin to that of the artist who, after all, imitated the nature of the stones *not* by making them look like stones, as per Hysminias's account, but like fire and water. This is an astonishing feat of painterly mimesis: the objects imitated by the artist—the stones—appear as stones because of their likeness to the combination of two contrasting elements, which is not itself "natural." Therefore, when Hysminias claims that the artist carefully imitated "the nature of the stones" by evoking fire and water (2.2.1–2.2.2), not only does he set up (consciously?) a paradox, but he also goes one step further and blurs the boundaries between the objects of imitation and the artist's products. Are the stones studying the crown in the image *like* the stones one finds in nature (in which case, they cannot resemble the wondrous mingling of fire and water)? Or are the stones, in fact, fire and water themselves? Hysminias's response to the image of the crown confounds the very question of the nature and the ontological status of the elements it evokes: painted stones and actual ones; actual fire and

water; and their miraculous conjunction in an image in which they constitute precious stones.

The mimetic confusion continues when Hysminias goes on to describe the stones not as stones, but as if they were fire and water. At one point while gazing upon the pearls set into the crown, Hysminias delightedly exclaims, "hailstones and fiery coals" (χάλαζα καὶ ἄνθρακες πυρός, Ps. 17:13 LXX), at which his friend Kratisthenes laughs, because Hysminias uses the wrong words;⁴⁷ that is, he refers to the stones as things that they are not. Kratisthenes' laughter, though only briefly mentioned, is important, as it signals that at least one of the two viewers failed to be beguiled by Hysminias's ekphrasis. For Kratisthenes, at least, the object depicted and the object of resemblance do not coincide. The effect of Kratisthenes' laughter on the reader, moreover, is significant. It restores an awareness—perhaps all too briefly—of the artifice of the image being viewed and the artifice of the rhetorical genre employed by Hysminias, which indulges in and celebrates precisely this sort of confusion.

Later in the description, Hysminias claims that the maiden's right hand touched her head and the "coal on her forehead" (ἡ δεξιὰ ταθεῖσα καὶ αὐτὴ κυρτωθεῖσα τῆς κεφαλῆς ἤψατο τῷ δακτύλῳ καὶ τοῦ περὶ τὸ μέτωπον ἄνθρακος, 2.2.5). His description, therefore, departs from its object, even as it aims to evoke the stones. In thus meandering away from the latter, the ekphrasis blurs the boundaries between the stones, the water, and the fire, such that the reader (and possibly Kratisthenes, despite his chortle) is made to wonder what exactly Hysminias is looking at, what he says he sees, and whether he is at all cognizant of the gap between the two. Sheer sensual delight is not the primary goal of the ekphrasis. Indeed, the narrative cannot proceed until the hero understands the identities of the figures on the wall. The slippage between the stones and other elements is precisely what hinders Hysminias's efforts to solve the riddles set by the painter; it impedes intellectual comprehension of the images.

It is surely significant that the play of art and nature occurs in the image of a crown. The word *στέφανος* recurs throughout the novel, both as a noun and in different forms of the verb *στεφανῶ*. *Hysmine*

44 Ibid., 114.

45 B. V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual and the Senses in Byzantium* (Philadelphia, 2010), 139–43.

46 James, *Light and Color*, 73–74; Pentcheva, *Sensual Icon*, 101–2.

47 *H&H* 2.2.3. Ὁ δὲ Κρατισθένης (παρὴν γὰρ καὶ αὐτός) ἀνεκάγχασέ μου τῇ παραχρήσει τοῦ ῥήματος. They are actually biblical words.

and *Hysminias* opens with a description of the city of Eurykomis, from which Hysminias hails; it is literally “crowned” by the sea (Πόλις Εὐρύκωμις . . . ὅτι καὶ θαλάσση στεφανανοῦται, 1.1.1). In Aulikomis, where Hysminias sees the images of the maidens, the wall on which they are painted surrounds, or crowns, the garden (2.2.1). At various points in the narrative, Hysminias sees processions of youths and maidens crowned with flowers. The crown is also associated with the protagonist himself. His status as a herald often requires Hysminias to don or divest himself of his crown of laurel, along with other accoutrements.⁴⁸ These are critical junctures, where the ancient associations between heralds and their ability to convey knowledge is subverted. I suggest that the insistent imagery of the crown weaves a web through the narrative, intertwining the themes of heraldry, eloquence, and mastery (or the lack of it).

Heralds in the ancient world performed various roles.⁴⁹ Not merely messengers, they were also required to proclaim honors at demes, officiate at sacrifices, and represent the *polis* from which they were dispatched. Heraldry were often regarded as stand-ins for the rulers whose messages they transmitted, hence their sometimes negative characterization in Greek tragedy. The ability to speak well was the primary attribute of a herald, although in certain cases the status was hereditary. The character of Hysminias assumes all the above functions. He presides over sacrifices as a herald, as a representative of the city of Eurykomis, and as a spokesman for Zeus.⁵⁰ Hysminias also possesses strong verbal powers: addressing Apollo at a sacrifice, he claims to be crowned with that god’s laurel; and, of course, he narrates his saga with pretty turns of phrase.⁵¹

Although Nilsson has convincingly proven the laurel’s association with virginity, its resonance with eloquence is equally powerful, especially when one recalls Aristotle’s discussion of the herald’s inability to *interpret* information, even as he *describes* it.⁵² This is an entirely just summation of Hysminias’s attitude.

Like the herald who describes Periander cutting off the tallest ears of corn without figuring out the meaning of that act, so too Hysminias offers wondrously eloquent descriptions of what he sees, without divining its significance. It is a subtle irony that the wearer of Apollo’s crown is occasionally mistaken (according to Kratisthenes) in his description of Wisdom’s painted crown. Finally, if the crown functions as a metaphor for a skillfully woven discourse, as was proclaimed by Constantine the Rhodian in the tenth century in his assertion that his ekphrasis of the Church of the Holy Apostles is a “crown all-plaited with the unblemished flowers of the Muses,”⁵³ then Hysminias’s ekphrasis may also be designated as such a discourse. The latter is not composed of flowers, laurels, or precious stones, but of words strung together beautifully, if bereft of interpretation.

Once Hysminias’s vision moves away from the crown, however, his ekphrasis becomes more subdued. Describing the maiden’s hands, he claims that they are white and virginal, with the right hand pointing to the “coal” crowning her forehead and the left holding a sphere. While skin might reflect a sheen similar to that of metal,⁵⁴ such does not seem to be the case here. The pallor of the maiden’s hands does not excite Hysminias’s verbal abilities because it does not possess the shimmering reflections of the stones. It is hue that comes into focus, which is contrasted to the changing spectacle of light offered by the stones. And yet even as the latter elicit his ekphrastic powers, they also lead Hysminias to use the “wrong words.” On the other hand, hue, as expressed in the white hands of the maiden, anchors Hysminias’s description to its referent, preventing him from the dangers of misinterpretation. Two divergent perceptions of color—as reflection and as hue—are thus proffered in Hysminias’s encounter with the first maiden depicted on the wall. Hysminias continues to calibrate his speech to the artist’s conceits, as he takes in the rest of the maiden’s figure. He ends his description

48 In Sosthenes’ house, for instance, Hysminias takes off his crown: *H&H* 1.7.2.

49 S. Lewis, *News and Society in the Greek Polis* (London, 1996), 53.

50 *H&H* 8.10.1–2.

51 *Ibid.*

52 Aristotle, *Politics*, 3, 1284a, ed. and trans. B. Jowett, *Politics* (New York, 2008), 130.

53 Constantine Rhodios, *On Constantinople and the Church of the Holy Apostles*, ed. J. Vassis, trans. L. James, V. Dimitropoulou, and R. Jordan (Farnham, 2012), 18–19, line 14. For a discussion of the text, see H. Maguire, “Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art,” *Gesta* 28, no. 2 (1989): 220–21.

54 The epic poem *Digenes Akrites*, for instance, claims that Digenes’ wife “shines with light.” See *Digenis Akrites*, 6.2490–97, ed. and trans. J. Mavrogordato (London, 1956), 89. For a discussion of this theme, see James, *Light and Color*, 87.

in pointedly spare terms that match the relative haste with which her dress was depicted, “as though the artist had already exhausted his capacities in depicting her head” with its marvelous crown (τὸν γὰρ πάντα κόσμον περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς κόρης ὁ τεχνίτης ἐκένωσε, 2.2.6).

If the precious stones lead Hysminias into confounding their referents, then the entire form of the second maiden induces him to vacillate over her identity: is she a warrior or a virgin? She appears as a military figure in her entirety, but for her eyes, which are too fierce to be virginal. Dressed in armor and breastplate and a warrior’s belt, the maiden is alternately sheathed in shining metal (which Hysminias does not describe in any detail, although he mentions that her helmet shines and ornaments her head) and displays soft, naked skin. Maguire’s analysis of different categories of saints in Byzantine art provides a useful index in this context.⁵⁵ According to Maguire, Byzantine artists of the eleventh century and beyond endowed military saints with volume and movement by the use of *contrapposto*, as opposed to virgin saints, who were depicted as demure, soft-skinned, and maidenly. In certain epigrams addressed to the military saints, their “whiteness” is attributed to the draining away of their strength in battle.⁵⁶

The second figure that Hysminias sees seems to be composed of precisely these two categories blended together: the shining metal is a symbol of aggression, while the pale skin is removed from—or results from—such belligerence. Moreover, this maiden is a patchwork combination of effects that were kept separate in the description of the first maiden, with her flashing crown and her virginal pallor. Hysminias claims that those parts of the second figure that were naked appear entirely virginal, whereas the parts that were covered in armor undoubtedly belong to a warrior.⁵⁷ However, there is at least one area of the maiden’s anatomy that seamlessly combines both identities: her hand is described as being as sturdy as an oak, but her fingers appear to be as soft as a girl’s. Hysminias ends by telling us that her hands wield a shield and a rod, as might be

depicted for the god Ares—“this maiden, or if you like, this warrior” (Ἀσπίς τῇ λαιᾷ τῇ παρθένῳ, εἰ δέ γε βούλει, τῇ στρατιώτιδι, 2.3.3).

Hysminias’s descriptions of these two maidens swing between the poles of sensual intensity and cool detachment, depending on the areas of the images that excite him the most. The reader, in turn, receives a curiously fragmented, if extravagant, view: in one case, an extended focus on a crown and its stones, while the rest of the maiden’s body is hurriedly brushed over; in the other, a curious configuration of warrior and virgin, her body fragmented into sections that are partly bellicose, partly delicate. Instead of a composite image, the reader is offered pieces, with some jutting out sharply, while others recede to near-invisibility. In this regard, Hysminias seems to follow the viewing habits of the eleventh-century polymath Michael Psellos, who on looking upon an icon of the Crucifixion remarked that in directing one’s gaze to different parts of the image, it might seem to the viewer “that some might alter, some might increase, some might change . . . as if presently waxing or waning.”⁵⁸

Hysminias is more balanced in his description of the third maiden in the group, whose entire figure, aspect, dress, and shoes he outlines in some detail; this is an important point to which I shall return later. Hysminias concentrates once again on hue, stating that this maiden was unlike the first because her crown was composed not of precious stones, but of leaves and flowers. The word for “flower” (ἄνθος) may also be used to designate “color,” “brightness,” or “luster” as James has pointed out.⁵⁹ In this case, the crown seems to be composed of “flowers,” but the larger semantic field is also active, for the statement immediately following refers to the quality of the hues constituting this crown. The rose is prominently excluded from the depiction. Hysminias speculates that either the artist forgot to put it in or renounced it, or that the colors depicted are weaker than those required to produce a deep rose-red; the colors are, therefore, not lustrous.⁶⁰

55 H. Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, 2000), 48–99.

56 Maguire, *Icons of Their Bodies*, 76.

57 *H&H* 2.3.3: Ἡ χεὶρ κατὰ δρυὶν παχεῖα. οἱ δέ γε δάκτυλοι πρὸς τὸ παρθενικὸν ἐγεγράφατο. Ἐν ὅσοις τῶν μελῶν ἐγυμνοῦτο, ὅλη παρθένος ἦν ἡ στρατιώτις. ἐν ὅσοις δὲ κατεπέφρακτο, ὅλην στρατιώτιν τὴν παρθένον ὀρᾷς.

58 A discussion and translation of this text is given in C. Barber, “Michael Psellos: Seeing through Painting,” in *Contesting the Logic of Painting: Art and Understanding in Eleventh-Century Byzantium*, ed. idem (Leiden, 2007), 76–98.

59 James, *Light and Color*, 74.

60 *H&H* 2.4.1–2: ἐστεφανωμένη τὴν κεφαλὴν οὐκ ἐκ λίθων κατὰ τὴν πρώτην, οὐκ ἐκ μαργάρων κατὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς, ἀλλ’ ὅλοις φύλλοις,

This crown, I suggest, is akin to the garden enclosure itself, which precedes the description of the painted maidens and is similarly filled with flowers and trees. The third crown distills Hysminias's focused gaze by constituting, in miniature, a painted version the larger landscape, but with one crucial difference. The actual garden contains roses. More specifically, it displays one rose in a chalice, another still enclosed in its bud, a third in full bloom, and a fourth dried up and fallen to the ground (τῶν ῥόδων τὸ μὲν προκύπτει τῆς κάλυκος, τὸ δ' ἐγκυμονεῖται, ἄλλο προκέκυφεν, ἔστι δ' ὃ καὶ πεπανθὲν κατὰ γῆν ἐρρύη, 1.4.1).

As Nilsson has shown, the motif of the rose in the novel is linked to eroticism; thus, the roses displayed in the garden seem to denote the four major stages of amorous development and decline. The maiden's crown, on the other hand, is curiously devoid of roses and any trace of their crimson hue. It appears to be a competing space within the garden, one that replicates some of the garden's elements while conspicuously excising others. Furthermore, this crown also emblemizes the tension between art and nature (as did the first maiden's crown) by referring outside itself to the garden as a whole. The latter is real, if tempered by man's touch. Enticing scents waft from it and an occasional breeze shakes the leaves. The miniature "garden"—the maiden's crown—is exclusively the product of the artist and, instead of emanating scents and breezes, offers a spectacle of color noticeable for what it lacks: the hue of the rose.

Hysminias goes on to describe the maiden's body, claiming that her right hand was so placed over her chest as to cover her right breast.⁶¹ The fingers of her hand further conceal the left breast, such that an onlooker might have believed the maiden to have no breasts at all. This is the posture in which a band of youths, maidens, men, and women—Eros's adherents—appear to Hysminias in his dream later that night.⁶² In that case, however, the hands are reversed, for Eros's attendants hold torches in their right hand, while the left is placed over the breast of each. The

reversal is apt because, as Hysminias soon learns, the painted maiden is Temperance and far removed from Eros. In a later dream in Book 6, Hysminias sees yet another host of youths and maidens whose heads are garlanded with roses, singing a hymn to Eros and an encomium to Aphrodite.⁶³ The maiden painted on the garden wall seems to be the precursor of her dream counterparts in certain aspects of her form, but she also functions as their opposite.

Hysminias's subsequent description of the maiden weaves together a set of paradoxes. While she conceals her breasts with her left hand, her right hand lightly lifts her garment to her thighs. Hysminias compares this effect to that of an "audacious wind" (πνεῦμα θρασὺ) that ripples over the thin robes of the pious maiden. He then goes on to make a curious observation: her right foot was intertwined with the left and her thighs were similarly positioned. "Thigh upon thigh and foot upon foot," remarks Hysminias, "so as not to display any part of her body" (μηρὸς ἐν μηρῷ καὶ ὅλος ποὺς ἐν ποδί, ἵνα μὴ τῷ λεπτῷ τοῦ χιτῶνος τὸ σῶμα διαφωτίζεται, 2.4.5). And yet it is precisely the thigh that does, in covering its twin, reveal itself, as does the foot. This maiden is composed of layers of cloth and limbs that attempt to conceal her form, but whose efforts are undone by the wayward wind. Hysminias ends by stating that the maiden wore black sandals, whose solidity ill concords with the rest of her depiction (Μέλαν τὸ πέδιλον τοῖν ποδοῖν καὶ ἀσφαλῶς ἐσκευασμένον καὶ μὴ κατὰ παρθένον ἡμφιεσμένον).

The third maiden is the only one of the four figures to elicit a full description from Hysminias. She is also the only figure devoid of any mention of color in its light-reflecting qualities. Hysminias briefly mentions that her garment and veil are white, her sandals black, and that the shades in her floral crown (which are not specified) denote weakness, in comparison to the missing fiery rose. Might the draining away of color be related to the relative fullness of Hysminias's ekphrasis? I would argue that such is, indeed, the case. If color in Byzantium was the tool that enabled the apprehension of form,⁶⁴ in this novel it is also an instrument that stimulates eloquence and sometimes leads it astray. The description of the third maiden lacks the evocative similes Hysminias uses for the first

ἀλλ' ὅλοις ἀνθεσι. Ῥόδον οὐκ εἶχεν ὁ στέφανος ἡ λαβομένου τοῦ τεχνίτου ἢ φεισμένου ἢ τῶν χρωμάτων ἡ ττωμένων τῆς τοῦ ῥόδου βαφῆς.

61 *H&H* 2.4.4: Ἡ δεξιὰ τῶν χειρῶν δεξιῶς ἐπικειμένη τῷ στήθει τὸν ὁμώνυμον κατακαλύπτει μαζόν. οἱ δάκτυλοι τὸν λαιὸν ὅλον περικαλύπτουσι κατεπικειμένοι καὶ φυλάσσοντες (ἄμαστον εἰποις ἰδὼν γεγράφθαι τὴν κόρην).

62 *H&H* 3.1.1.

63 *H&H* 6.18.1.

64 L. James, "Color and Meaning in Byzantium," *JECrSt* 11 (2003): 223–33.

two, other than his mention of the wind that ripples over her garments. But the motif of the wind, in fact, serves to reinforce the impression of the image's overall reticence. Hysminias does not spin further similes from it, as he does for the crown; nor does he evince the confusion that informs his description of the second maiden. Instead, he quotes a phrase from Hesiod about the boreal wind not blowing through a soft-skinned virgin (διὰ γάρ τοι παρθενικῆς ἀπαλόχροος οὐ διάησιν αἰθρηγενέτης βορρᾶς, 2.4.5). The phrase is repeated (if not in the same words) in Hysminias's later description of the months depicted on the garden wall, when he remarks that winter does not penetrate the skin of a young maiden.⁶⁵ Where he does permit himself the use of a simile, Hysminias succeeds in hitting the mark, unlike the previous cases. *Enargeia* here manages to be both metaphorical and truthful. When we recall that one of the definitions of *enargeia* in the *Suda* qualifies it as "the whiteness and luminosity of discourse" (ἡ τῶν λόγων λευκότης καὶ φανότης),⁶⁶ then the maiden's palor and Hysminias's relatively accurate description seem to be in direct correlation. This maiden is a personification of Temperance and, accordingly, seems to have elicited a temperate description from the hero.

The fourth and final maiden gets short shrift in comparison with the other three, but this brevity does not detract from a lyrical appreciation. The maiden is "wholly ethereal" (αἰθέριος ὄλη), displays a "pious aspect" (σχῆμα σεμνῆ), and appears to be enfolded in a cloud, her eyes turned upward to the heavens. In her right hand she holds a balance, in her left, fire. Her tunic is red, thus returning Hysminias to color and its complexities: "The red was somewhat mixed with white, but whether the white originated from the maiden's body and flowed into the tunic, the artist did not allow one's eyes to discern" (Ἐρυθρὸς ὁ χιτῶν, ἀλλ' ἔχει τι καὶ λευκότητος. εἰ δὲ τοῦ σώματός ἐστι τὸ λευκὸν καὶ διαρρεῖ τὸν χιτῶνα, ὁ τεχνίτης οὐκ ἀφῆκεν ὁρᾶν, 2.5.1). Does the red signify the maiden's tunic and the white her body beneath, or do both shades constitute her clothing and, therefore, the uppermost layer of the image? Once again, where color is mentioned its origins—and, consequently, the forms that it covers—are diluted. There is a sense here of what the Italian

Renaissance referred to as *sfumatura*, a gentle shading that blurs contours and causes form to recede into the background.⁶⁷ The color red seems to be the consistent mischief-maker in Hysminias's account, leading to hermeneutic uncertainties.

Our hero then offers a pithy summing-up of the four: "thus were the maidens shown" (Οὕτω μὲν οὖν εἶχον αἱ γυναικες, 2.6.1). He goes on to say that he and his friend sought to know, with loving diligence, who the maidens were and what roles they played. They notice, above the heads of the maidens, certain letters put together in iambic verse and divided into four parts, each of which assigns names to them: Wisdom, Strength, Temperance, and Justice (the verses are not given in their entirety in the narrative). Then, Hysminias and Kratisthenes look at the forms of the maidens once again and understand what had so far been unclear to them.⁶⁸

This set of actions on the part of the two friends requires a second look, much like the one the painted maidens solicit. During his entire account of the images on the wall, not once does Hysminias or Kratisthenes (or Makrembolites) reveal that they are accompanied by words. Indeed, one suspects that both were blind to them until the moment described above, when they see the inscribed letters. This is surely surprising, since Hysminias spends a great deal of time describing the heads of the maidens and, in the first case, the crown upon it. To have so utterly neglected the inscriptions positioned above those heads suggests a willful reluctance to read, or a genuine immersion in the images that obliterates all other media in Hysminias's eyes.

Epigrams, such as the ones that presumably accompanied the images of the maidens, were usually commemorative because they incorporated the names of their donors/composers. Joseph W. Day's study of archaic Greek epigrams asserts that "dedications with epigrams memorialized the ritual of their own

65 *H&H* 4.18.13: ὁ γάρ τοι χειμῶν διὰ κόρης ἀπαλόχροος οὐ διάησι. See F. Solmsen, ed., *Hesiodi Opera* (Oxford, 1970), lines 518–19.

66 Papaioannou, "Byzantine Enargeia" (n. 23 above), 50.

67 A fascinating discussion of the term *sfumatura* and its etymological and associative links to the word "nuance" may be found in E. W. Bulatkin, "The Italian Word *Sfumatura*," *PMLA* 72, no. 5 (1957): 823–53.

68 *H&H* 2.6.1–2: γράμματα τοίνυν ὁρῶμεν ὑπὲρ τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν παρθένων, ἃ πάνθ' ὑπῆρχον ἱαμβεῖον ἐν εἰς τέτταρα τετμημένον καὶ ταῖς παρθένους τὰς κλήσεις ἀφοσιούμενον. τὸ δ' εἶχεν οὕτω, Φρόνησις, Ἰσχὺς, Σωφροσύνη καὶ Θέμις. Ἐντεῦθεν ἐφιλοσοφοῦμεν τὰ τῶν γυναικῶν σχήματα καὶ τὰ μέχρι τοῦ τόθ' ἡμῖν κατελαμβάνομεν ἀκατάληπτα . . .

dedication.”⁶⁹ The oral enunciation of the epigram by a viewer reperformed the original ritual context of the donation, thereby preserving the donor’s name and his votive act for perpetuity. Alice-Mary Talbot’s examination of Byzantine epigrams points us to yet another aspect of this genre of texts: they could be lengthy and sometimes included evocative descriptions of the objects on which they were inscribed.⁷⁰ Indeed, as Maguire’s study of the epigrams of John Geometres shows, they could include a strong ekphrastic component.⁷¹ Thus, the epigram effectively reperforms the ritual, with all its attendant dedications, the object, and the experience of the object for the viewer who gives it voice.

In our episode, the epigrams are silenced; other than their composition in iambic verse and their revelation of the identities of the maidens, the reader is given no other insight into their form or content. I suggest that this occurs for a good reason: the epigrams furnish a potentially competing text to Hysminias’s ekphraseis and are excised precisely so that the relative merits and disadvantages of Hysminias’s point of view can be foregrounded for the reader. Makrembolites sustains his protagonist’s ignorance of the identity of the images he views through the medium of ekphrasis, a condition that could have been easily resolved by reference to the epigrams. Thus does Makrembolites set the stage for a *gradual* revelation of meaning, in which it is Hysminias’s reperformance of his ekphrasis, much abbreviated the second time around, that the reader is given, along with the attendant knowledge Hysminias acquires. A spontaneous oral response to the suite of images is proffered, rather than written descriptions and explications. This is a striking instance of viewing in which the images are sundered from their texts, even when the viewer clearly needs some explanation and when the texts are blatantly juxtaposed with the images.

And yet, the lack of the texts never detracts from the suggestive beauty and subtlety of Hysminias’s description—which is surely Makrembolites’ point. Nor does Hysminias’s lack of knowledge regarding the maidens prevent him from being able to depict them

vividly in words, if in selective fashion. His ekphraseis are certainly successful in stirring the vital emotions of wonder, delight, and immersion, at least in himself. On the other hand, they also almost succeed in deceiving Hysminias with their illusionistic force. Almost, because in reading through the passages one has the impression that he never quite forgets the hand of the artist and is, indeed, aware that what he sees is ultimately “art,” and not “stones,” “fire,” “water,” and so on. Similarly, the reader is constantly aware that he, too, sees through Hysminias’s eyes, which are, in turn, subject to Makrembolites’ manipulations. But for all that, there are a few moments when Hysminias (and the reader?) allows himself to delight in the deceptions of that all-too-illusionistic crown, much as the “correct” reader of a saint’s life immerses himself in the world of the saint in the course of his reading.⁷² The difference, of course, is that despite his affective immersion, Hysminias comes no closer to understanding what he sees, nor its function. In fact, it is only *after* he satisfies himself with a prolonged viewing of the maidens that the issues of their identity and function even occur to him (and ostensibly to Kratisthenes, as well). The episode presents, therefore, a deliberate separation of image and text, which leads to a fractured process of viewing, broken into distinct stages.

Interestingly, Hysminias’s neglect of the texts continues, even after he claims to have read them. Instead of recounting the entire content of the iambic verses, he goes straight to the principal figures named by them: Wisdom, Strength, Temperance, and Justice. The staccato rendering of their identities is in deliberate contrast to the lingering eloquence Hysminias exhibits; yet, that brevity also speaks to the sheer effectiveness of the names. Because of the latter, the roles of the depicted maidens, their dress, postures, expressions, and accoutrements, are almost instantly comprehensible. These abstract nouns, even as they take up far less space and time in the narrative, are more telling (pun intended) than Hysminias’s extended and sensitive description. A somewhat similar phenomenon is observed in the calendars of the saints compiled by Christopher of

69 J. W. Day, *Archaic Greek Epigram and Dedication: Representation and Reperformance* (Cambridge, 2010), 4.

70 A.-M. Talbot, “Epigrams in Context: Metrical Inscriptions in Art and Architecture of the Palaiologan Era,” *DOP* 53 (1999): 75–90.

71 H. Maguire, “Epigrams, Art, and the ‘Macedonian Renaissance,’” *DOP* 48 (1994): 105–15.

72 L. Brubaker, “Perception and Conception: Art, Theory, and Culture in Ninth-Century Byzantium,” *Word & Image* 5 (1989): 19–32.

Mytilene in the eleventh century.⁷³ While the saints were usually commemorated in lengthy hagiographic narratives that enabled the reader's affective incorporation into the tale (apart from brief synaxarion notices), Christopher presents crisp iambic verses in remembrance of each holy being in the calendar. In *Hysmine and Hysminias*, the value of each type of rhetorical accompaniment (to the images, in this case) is implicitly debated. Even though the novel, as a whole, devotes more of its energies to elaborate description, from which it also derives its narrative zest, it is the names embedded in the iambic verses that enable the plot to move forward and that permit Hysminias—and the reader—to derive meaning.

Armed with this knowledge, Hysminias now subjects the maidens to a second—but not more searching—glance. This time he offers a rapid run-through of the images, in which he repeats, and also abbreviates, his earlier descriptions. Hysminias weaves in some new observations as well, but the main body of the text remains more or less intact, if greatly shortened. The repetition, in conjunction with the identities of the maidens, serves to clarify everything: the reason why Wisdom points to the precious crown adorning her head, the crown's splendor, the gold around her neck, the silver, the hyacinth, and so on, even including the disorder of her dress, for—according to Hysminias—Wisdom is orderly only in her head and nowhere else.⁷⁴

The second maiden, however, still poses problems, despite the revelation of her identity as Strength. Hysminias claims that she was a warrior by nature and a virgin maiden by calling, or name. He repeats the statement barely a line later, adding that “just as the artist guarded the name in the nature, so did he fashion with colors the entire nature in the name” (καὶ ὡς ἐν τῇ φύσει τὴν κλήσιν ὁ ζωγράφος παρεφύλαξατο, οὕτω καὶ τῇ κλήσει τὴν φύσιν ὅλην ὑπερχρωμάτισε, 2.6.4).⁷⁵

73 Ed. E. Follieri, *I calendari in metro innografico di Cristoforo Mitileneo* (Brussels, 1980).

74 *H&H* 2.6.2–3: τὸν λαμπρὸν στέφανον τῆς πρώτης παρθένου, τοὺς περὶ τὸν στέφανον λίθους, τοὺς μαργάρους, τὸν περὶ τὴν δέρην χρυσόν, τὸν ἄργυρον, τὸν ὑάκινθον, τὸ σχῆμα τῆς δεξιᾶς μονοῦ λεγούσης, ὡς ἐνταῦθα τὸν ὄλβον ἔχω περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν, τὸ περὶ τὴν λαιὰν σφαιρίδιον, ὡς συνέχει τὸ πᾶν, καὶ τὸ τοῦ χιτῶνος ἀπερικόσμητον, ὡς τὰλλα πάντα πλὴν τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀκοσμήτως ἢ φρόνησις ἐστάται.

75 The verb, according to the TLG, is a hapax. An alternative translation of the epigram could be: “just as the artist guarded the [virginal] name in its [warrior] nature, so also under the entire

If Hysminias confuses art and nature in the case of the first maiden, then he seems to suffer a similar puzzlement, or at least a hesitation, in distinguishing between the name (*klesis*) and the nature (*phusis*) of the second. The two point in somewhat opposite directions, certainly in iconographic terms, if not conceptually.

After the troubled years of Iconoclasm, when the icon was validated as an integral component of Orthodoxy, one of its essential components was the name it bore. The name was perceived to tie the object—the icon—securely to its referent.⁷⁶ The importance of the inscription was twofold: it bridged the gap between the icon and its subject, and it allowed icons to be differentiated among themselves. In certain cases, such as the icons of the Virgin and Christ in the narthex of Hagia Sophia, their names are inscribed in roundels whose size and visibility equal that of the haloes enfolding the holy figures.⁷⁷ The graphic dimension of the holy name, therefore, was exploited as a parallel, or rival, to the image itself.

In the eleventh century, Eustratios of Nicaea enumerated a series of arguments, primarily against Leo of Chalcedon, concerning the relation between form and nature and the implications for their pictorial depiction.⁷⁸ In one passage, the character designated as Leo (referred to as the “Lover of his friends” in the dialogue) claims that the form and nature of a person are necessarily identical, to which the character designated as Eustratios (“the Lover of truth”) responds that such is not the case: when painters depict Christ, they manage to depict only his human nature, whereas he is both human and divine. The point of my argument is that the same issues that had furnished fertile ground for debate during the eighth and ninth centuries were still being

[warrior] nature he painted the [virginal] name.” I am grateful to Joel Kalvesmaki for this insight and the alternative translation.

76 K. Boston, “The Power of Inscriptions and the Trouble with Texts,” in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. A. Eastmond and L. James (Burlington, VT, 2003), 35–58; H. Maguire, “Eufrosius and Friends: On Names and Their Absence in Byzantine Art,” in James, *Art and Text* (n. 20 above), 139–60.

77 R. S. Nelson, “Image and Inscription: Pleas for Salvation in Spaces of Devotion,” in James, *Art and Text*, 102.

78 A discussion of Eustratios of Nicaea and his texts may be found in C. Barber, “Eustratios of Nicaea and the Constraints of Theology,” in idem, *Contesting the Logic of Painting* (n. 58 above), 99–130.

debated in the eleventh.⁷⁹ For the purposes of this essay, and the second maiden on the wall, it is important to place Hysminias's differentiation between her form and her nature (as revealed by the inscription, or her name) within its intellectual context, deriving from the endless debates on whether Christ's image encompassed both his human and divine dimensions. When Hysminias says that the artist guarded both her name and her nature, he attempts to reconcile what, to his eyes, is a sharp divergence between the maiden's verbal identity and her visual depiction. Even if the latter manages to entwine the virgin and the warrior seamlessly, the two states of being are clearly opposed in Hysminias's eyes and resist unification. However, the inscription, or name—Strength—appears to allow him a framework within which to begin to reconcile them. This is a small but powerful instance of the ways in which the Byzantine romance incorporated the key issues of reigning theological conundrums into its pagan framework.

Going on to the third maiden, Hysminias again rapidly recounts the features he has already described before in greater detail: her crown of flowers and leaves, her ringlets, her veil, her covered breasts, her thigh covering the other thigh, her modesty even toward the wind, and so on. Then Hysminias addresses the artist directly: "I clasp your hand, O artist, and kiss your pencil, for apart from the other [details], you have not mixed the rose into the crown of one whose being is that of a virgin. For temperance and the rose share nothing in common; the rose turns deep red in its face from shame" (Περιτύσσομαι σου τὴν χεῖρα, γραφεῦ. ἀσπάζομαι τὴν γραφίδα. Χάριν ὁμολογῶ σοι πρὸς γε τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅτι μὴ τῷ στεφάνῳ τῆς ὀντως παρθένου τὸ ῥόδον συνέπλεξας. Οὐδὲν κοινὸν σωφροσύνη καὶ ῥόδῳ τῷ αἰσχροῦς βαφέντι καὶ τῆς αἰδοῦς ἐρυθραίνομένῳ τὸ πρόσωπον, 2.6.6).

This is the first time in the episode that the color red is granted a specific moral value, and one that conflicts with modesty. If we go back to Hysminias's description of the first crown, we find that it appeared to him to "blush" in a torrent of waves. In a similar vein, the fourth maiden is depicted as an amalgam of red and white. Specifically, her red garment seems to lie on top of, or be mingled with, a white ground, much like the circlets of rouge that we see on the white cheeks of

comely females in Byzantine art.⁸⁰ Hysminias applauds the lack of the color red on the third maiden and, more to the point, its association with the blush. What might this mean?

Red, as it appeared on a human body, especially on a white countenance, was often likened to a "bloom" or to "youth" by Byzantine writers and thinkers. Michael Psellos's *Chronographia* is a case in point; in it, he invariably refers to the youthful radiance of various historical characters in terms of a blossom.⁸¹ The young Constantine IX Monomachos, for instance, is said to have "had a blooming complexion . . ." (ἀνθοῦν εἶχε τὸ πρόσωπον, 6.16.5–7), and Theodora's counselors are criticized for persuading the Empress that she had "blossomed again like a new plant" (αὐτῆς ἀνθῆσαι ὥσπερ νεόφυτον, 6a.15.20) in her old age. These examples reveal the positive qualities of beauty associated with the color red, but lurking behind the references to youth is the dangerously fugitive nature of this phenomenon. In vanishing from a person's face and figure (as in Theodora's case), the color not only signals gradual decrepitude, but also has the potential to destabilize form to the point of distortion. Part of an ekphrasis by St. Basil in a homily on the Forty Martyrs is pertinent here.⁸² In describing the freezing cold suffered by the martyrs, Basil remarks that "the body that has been exposed to cold first becomes all livid as the blood freezes . . . Then the extremities of the body are mutilated . . ." (Σῶμα γὰρ κρύει παραπεσὸν πρῶτον μὲν ὅλον ἐστὶ πελιδνόν, πηγγυμένον τοῦ αἵματος . . . Ἐπειτα ἀκρωτηριάζεται, . . . καιομένων τῶν ἄκρων. Ἀποδιωκόμενον γὰρ τὸ θερμὸν ἀπὸ τῶν περάτων τοῦ σώματος . . ., PG 31:516A–B). This ekphrasis evokes the gradual draining away of blood—its redness, or lividness—from the human body, resulting in its mutilation. The colors constituting the blush—red and white—are thus linked to the potential blurring of

80 The depiction of Empress Zoe in the south gallery of Hagia Sophia is one instance of this phenomenon.

81 Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, ed. C. Sathas, *The History of Psellus* (1899, repr. New York, 1979), 99, 185; trans. E. R. A. Sewter (New Haven, 1953), 119, 203. For a discussion, see A. R. Littlewood, "Imagery in the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos," in *Reading Michael Psellos*, ed. C. Barber and D. Jenkins (Leiden, 2006), 17–20. See Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, ed. S. Impellizzeri (Venice, 1984).

82 The ekphrasis is from *Homily* 9.5 ("In sanctos quadraginta martyres"; PG 31:516A–B). For discussion and a translation, see Maguire, *Art and Eloquence* (n. 39 above), 40.

79 A comprehensive discussion of this trend is given by Barber in *Contesting the Logic of Painting*.

form with the passage of time. This is certainly the case with the fourth maiden: as he views her, Hysminias literally cannot distinguish between foreground and background—her garment and her body. Instead of enabling the discernment of form, color robs it of definition.⁸³

A similar conception informs Hysminias's condemnation of the color red. The phenomenon of the painted blush leads him to confuse and distort the forms he sees, referring to stones as "fire" and "water" in one case, and being unable to distinguish foreground from background in the next. On the one hand, he is evidently attracted by the multifaceted nature of the color; on the other, he seems indignantly aware of the hermeneutical traps it lays for him. In this context, then, the Byzantine love for multiple meanings and associations in the medium of color is gently critiqued. James has rightly pointed out that the Byzantines valued and admired polychrome effects.⁸⁴ This observation is certainly true in Hysminias's case, as evinced by the exuberance of his ekphraseis, but the appreciation of beauty does not necessarily lead to comprehension. In contrast, the third maiden on the wall, in whose depiction the colors are *not* said to be blended together, is the one who merits the most complete and accurate account.

The striking detail in that ekphrasis is Hysminias's closing line, which emphasizes the solid black contours of her sandals, which stand out from the rest of her depiction. When we recall that her veil and garment are white, this maiden then seems to encompass the two opposite ends of the Byzantine color spectrum: black and white, between which all the other colors were believed to originate.⁸⁵ By standing for the two dominant and most blatantly contrasting hues, the third maiden differs from the others, in whom the effects of color and light are more diluted. Hysminias, crucially, finds the white and black contrast jarring,

whereas he takes genuine delight in the shades of the other maidens, be they ever so confusingly intertwined. The episode closes with Hysminias listing the attributes of Justice yet again, before he turns to another suite of images that render him awestruck.

It is worth reiterating the striking ways in which the first and second episodes of viewing differ. The second does no justice to Hysminias's considerable powers of ekphrasis; he pays homage to the skill of the artist, but recounts the contents of the image in a straightforward—indeed, astonishingly prosaic—manner, devoid of metaphorical embellishment. The reader is, instead, offered a set of disappointingly mundane questions about why the men and beasts in the image seem to fear the handsome nude figure presiding in their midst. Furthermore, in this second episode, Hysminias specifically asks Kratisthenes to explain the image to him "in relation to the epigram" that accompanies it ("σύ μοι τὰ περὶ τὴν γραφὴν φιλοσόφει καὶ τῇ γραφῇ προσάρμοττε τὸ ἐπίγραμμα," 2.11.2). The responses of the two viewers are consciously mediated by the epigram, which is given far more space and importance.

Why does Makrembolites juxtapose these two episodes? More importantly, why are the disjunctions between them so marked, even though they follow each other seamlessly and the images in question are depicted at the same site, on the same garden wall, and viewed by the same pair? I would contend that the differences in the tenor of Hysminias's responses are Makrembolites' means of putting forth the strengths and pitfalls of ekphrasis itself as a mode of response to an image. The first episode allows the full-fledged and spontaneous expression of Hysminias's delight upon seeing the images. His effusions confound art and nature, incorporate the value of color, and unfold as a process of viewing that repeats itself in content, but differs in its levels of comprehension. The first episode thus deals deftly with some of the longstanding preoccupations of ancient and medieval art—namely, the paradoxically productive and fraught relations between nature and culture, the artist and the orator, and words and images. All these issues are framed and examined in the mode of description, played out not once, but twice in quick succession, with differences that powerfully affect Hysminias's (and the reader's) apprehension of the images.

But even as description exhausts itself by its second replay in the first episode, appearing almost superfluous, it manages to retain some of its initial splendor,

83 See, for instance, Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon 1* ("In canticum canticorum"), where he remarks (PG 44:776A), "... anyone who looks at the picture that has been completed through the skilful use of colours does not stop with the mere contemplation of the colours ... rather he looks at the form which the artist has created in colours" (trans. James). Ὡς περ δὲ κατὰ τὴν γραφικὴν ἐπιστήμην ὅλη μὲν τις ἐστὶ πάντως ἐν διαφόροις βαφαῖς ἢ συμπληρούσα τοῦ ζώου τὴν μίμῃσιν. ὁ δὲ πρὸς τὴν εἰκόνα βλέπων, τὴν ἐκ τῆς τέχνης διὰ τῶν χρωμάτων συμπληρωθεῖσαν. See the discussion by James, *Light and Color*, 128.

84 James, *Light and Color*, 122.

85 Ibid., 75.

which surely still vibrates in the reader's memory. Even if punctuated with "wrong words" or false referents, and empty of the essential knowledge that comes with the texts, the first performance by Hysminias encapsulates a profoundly empathetic response to the visual, at the expense of all other potential distractions. The sheer artistry of the images unleashes the hero's descriptive torrent, which conjures other, equally captivating images for the reader (such as fiery stones, and so forth). As such, that performance constitutes a resounding statement on the superior attraction of images for this particular viewer and on the purely affective qualities of ekphrasis. By the time Hysminias arrives at the second suite of images, there is a decided depletion of verbal ingenuity on his part. Even though the words of the epigram are now granted an importance they were previously denied—and this is underlined by Hysminias's request (command?) to Kratisthenes to heed them—the explanation that follows is bereft of ekphrastic qualities. And when such is the case, Makrembolites seems to imply, response is similarly bereft of verbal energy. The viewer's relationship to the images, forged by words that should ideally try to match, or even supersede, those images, is drained of vitality. Even when—and precisely because—ekphrasis confounds nature and artifice, it energizes and quickens both the object under view and the viewer's sensibilities. In the second episode, however, sense trumps sensibility; the epigram triumphs over ekphrasis.

Perhaps it is fitting, then, that Hysminias should have been moved to eloquence by the images of the maidens alone and that their description is the most compelling section of the entire episode dealing with the painted wall in Sosthenes' garden. If description is a primary interpretative act, as Jaś Elsner has argued,⁸⁶ and the bedrock upon which "further layers of analysis"⁸⁷ come to rest, then Makrembolites offers

us a stirring example right at the outset of his novel. Since the description here involves the translation of the visual to the verbal, the "betrayal" of the image that inevitably arises in the movement from art to text is exposed in Hysminias's ekphraseis.⁸⁸ This betrayal lies in the selective nature of his point of view and in the omissions and additions he makes in his description of the maidens. If the slippages in this seemingly simple act are so marked, then how reliable is Hysminias as the narrator of the novel, which is filtered entirely through his narrative and rhetorical powers? Does Makrembolites drop a hint here to the reader about the subjectivity of his protagonist's point of view and its possible consequences for the shape, texture, and direction of the novel? I am inclined to suggest that such is indeed the case. But this hint is neither a warning nor an impediment to the reader's enjoyment of the work. Instead, it solicits the reader to make choices about what he wishes to take away from Hysminias's verbal abilities, to make sense of their embedded contradictions, and to gauge the modes in which ekphrasis contributes to, or detracts from, the clarity and vibrancy of the narrative. What the reader takes away is both a critique and a celebration of the power of words, which, after all, form the primary substance of the story, that—its narrator hopes—will be known to posterity as "The narrative of Hysmine and of me, Hysminias."⁸⁹

University of Michigan,
Ann Arbor
History of Art
110 Tappan Hall
855 South University Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1357
paroma@umich.edu

86 J. Elsner, "Art History as Ekphrasis," *Art History* 33, no. 1 (2010): 11.

87 Ibid., 12.

88 The issue of "betrayal" is discussed thoroughly by Elsner, *ibid.*, 10–27.

89 *H&H* 11.23.3. The last line of the novel is κλήσις δ' ἔσται τῇ βιβλῷ τὸ καθ' Ὑσμίνην δράμα καὶ τὸν Ὑσμίναν ἐμέ.

☞ I THANK GLENN PEERS AND LAURA WEIGERT for having kindly invited me to participate in a panel at the College Art Association in February 2010, where the first version of this paper was presented, and I thank Richard Shiff for his comments on it. I am grateful to the two anonymous readers for their

suggestions and to Margaret Mullett for her encouragement and support. Last, but not least, my gratitude extends to Robert S. Nelson and Jaś Elsner for having introduced me to the dangers and delights of ekphrasis. Unless otherwise credited all translations are my own.